2: Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

At the market at Yakutsk I have seen white clay pottery made with the potter's wheel. These wares were made by Russians. I could not learn, however, the origin of the white clay.

The Yakut of the northern districts of Yakut Province, Verkhoyansk and Kolymsk, of the lower course of the Lena, and of the villages on the Olenek, Khatanga, and Anabara rivers, neither use pottery nor have any knowledge of its manufacture, but utilize iron and copper utensils. It is curious that they do not know that their southern relatives from whom they separated about two hundred fifty years ago still use and make pottery. This is surprising since there are passages in folk tales referring to clay pots.

The fate of Yakut pottery demonstrates the possible differences in the sequence of development of culture. Among civilized nations the ceramic art has been perfected simultaneously with the development in the production and manufacture of metals. With the Yakut, as with other Siberian tribes, the opposite occurred. For instance, the present Kamchadal and Koryak do not know that their forefathers made pottery, but archaeological excavations[1] by the author on Kamchatka Peninsula and within the territory of the Koryak brought to light ancient specimens of their pottery. Compared with the Koryak and Kamchadal, however, the Yakut are relatively much more advanced in culture having, in the past, been affiliated with other civilized Turkic nations of southwestern Asia.

Metals

At present the Yakut are acquainted with iron, copper, bronze, silver, gold, tin, and lead. All these metals, except tin and lead, still retain their old Turkic names: iron, *timir;* copper, *altan*, red copper, *jas altan*, yellow copper; brass, *ūös altan* or *ūrūñ altan;* bronze, *čyañ* (after Sieroszevski); silver, *kömüs* or *ürüñ kömüs* (white *kömus*); gold, *kysyl kömüs* (red silver); tin, *xolholyun;* lead, *sibinäs*, *xolholyun* is a Mongol word and *sibinas* a Russian word (*svinetz*).

Iron. Iron (*timir*) is historically and economically the most important metal among the Yakut who were acquainted with the reduction of iron ores and iron manufacture before reaching their present abode. There are no data to prove that they worked iron before they learned the manufacture and use of copper, bronze, and other metals. In central Siberia, on the Yenisei and Angara rivers, ancient sites have been discovered on which remains of the late neolithic period were found

[1] Jochelson, Waldemar, Archaeological Investigations in Kamchatka (*Carnegie Institution of Washington*, No. 388, Washington 1928), 69–76.

7: Shklovsky -- 50 T-3 (1891-92) 1916 Yakut
116, 538, 585, 776

"Although the Yakuts had been 'Christianised' a hundred years previously, paganism remained in full strength and to the numerous gods of their pantheon they added Christian saints. Probably there was no marriage ceremony in former times, for though Yakutian legends are extraordinarily rich in detail, the marriages of heroes are only very briefly described.

'The hero enters the hut, sees the beauty seated there, seizes her without delay, bends her like a twig, smells (kisses) her, they cohabited.' This constituted the ancient marriage rite, and the present one is not much in itself, the chief ceremonies being centered round the escorting of the bride to her new home."

7: Shklovsky -- 209-210 T-3 (1891-92) 1916 Yakut
116, 538

"To this day, in the farthest north-east of Siberia you will hear in some dark hut, lighted only by the fire, the story of the dreadful death of Djennik, [RCH: see category 116, pp. 208-209] told in monotonous recitative by an old blind woman.

The Yakutian epics are remarkable for their wonderful richness of imagination and wealth of description. [210] The old woman describes in minute detail the terrible operation of flaying, and what kind of knives were used; and on the seats by the wall are the listening Yakuts, with pale, terrified faces, too frightened to utter a word."

27: Coxwell--23 B-3 (no date) 1925 Yakut
116, 157, 538

"Various racial traits influence tales. The Tunguses, possessors of admirable qualities such as courage, patience, kindliness and courtesy, lack mental ability and energy. Consequently it is not astonishing that the account of the Creation, called the 'Beginning,' which is ascribed to them, is puerile. The Lapps are simple and gentle, and so, while they have wonderful myths, they would scarcely produce a cruel story like the Yakut 'Dyoudus.' Certain elementary Lappish stories, without a spark of fancy, imply a low mentality. It is true that the Lapps have some highly imaginative stories. But races such as the Kalmucks or Russians apparently seldom produce poor stories. The Russian tales are extraordinarily varied. Their polished drolls and personified abstractions and devout legends are quite beyond Siberian savages and barbarians, though the Kirghiz, Altaians and Yakuts have some fine heroic narratives comparable with the Russian epics."

27: Coxwell--25 B-3 (no date) 1925 Yakut
116, 538

"Primitive tales are apt to mention a certain physical peculiarity; thus an additional eye may be situated at the back of the neck, or a solitary eye may be present, either in the middle of the forehead or on the top of the head, or there may be four eyes. Such idiosyncrasies of one kind or another characterise the early fiction of races so far removed as the Yakut, the Kalmuck, the Samoyede, the Lapp, the Russian and the White-Russian."

27: Coxwell--28 B-3 (no date) 1925 Yakut
116, 538, 776

"It is of importance that travellers who have lived with Sub-Arctic races describe them as being even now primitive savages of a kind depicted in their folk-tales. We learn that the Koryaks and Chukchis sacrifice dogs wholesale to propitiate evil spirits; that both Chukchis and Koryaks kill the old people; and that both races believe completely in the Shaman's ability to communicate with the dead. The tales of these races do not reproduce past so much as they adumbrate present beliefs. But as we proceed gradually to the tales of less ignorant and barbaric races, we find portrayed a less thorough belief in the existence of supernatural beings. Thus the necessity of throwing a portion of food to the Spirit of Fire, among the Yakuts, or to the house-spirit, among the Letts, is depicted as far from universal and as less compelling than is the necessity of sacrificing to the evil powers among the above mentioned Sub-Arctic races."

27: Coxwell--34 B-3 (no date) 1925 Yakut
116, 157, 181, 538

"Such a trait as barbarity or cruelty is still so common among mankind that it would be remarkable if it did not here figure undisguised. But the callous narration of torture or of mutilation, which distinguishes certain stories among the Chukchis, the Ossetes and the Yakuts, differentiates them from anything which could occur among civilised races. Cruelty occurs among ourselves, but is only described with reprehension."

27: Coxwell--34-35 B-3 (no date) 1925 Yakut
116, 538, 776, 782

"A belief in the efficacy of sacrifices to spirits is clearly revealed by the tales of the Gilyaks, Koryaks, Chukchis, Yakuts and Letts. That trees have been supposed to speak and act is implied in Tungusian, Lappish, Chukchi, and even Russian stories. The belief that spirits in monstrous forms attack men is indicated by simple and earnest narratives of the lowest Siberian races and even of the Yakuts. Though a story is not [35] necessarily a proof of belief, it is probably true that the wide existence of a story points to a degree of acceptance, not far removed from a belief, in races whose powers of discrimination between the gradations of make believe are small. Do not our children crave to be told that a tale is true?"

27: Coxwell--40 B-3 (no date) 1925 Yakut
116, 538, 776

"But the space surrounding mankind may be peopled by creatures more unpleasant than most beasts of the field. Evil spirits in Siberian primitive literature may have the shape of men, as in the first Lamut (Tungusian) tale, or possess merely a 'monstrous shape,' or a human face and a dog's body, or five heads, as in different Koryak myths. A one-eyed, one-armed, one-legged devil's daughter, in the Yakut story, 'The Little Old Woman with Five Cows,' possesses an iron tongue fifty feet long."

36: Niemojowski-- 106-107 T-2 (no date) 1883 Yakut
116, 538, 517

" Their greatest pleasure, especially during the long winter [107]nights,, consists in large gatherings in their yourts to listen to long stories related by those among them who are distinguished by their talent in that line "

36: Niemojowski--107-109 T-2 (no date) 1883 Yakut-1-3
116, 538

" If a traveller, acquainted with the Yakut language or having a good interpreter, finds himself within a yourt at such a time, and flatters himself he has at last come upon a mine of traditions or popular legends, he is soon undeceived, the narratives of the Yakuts being neither history nor legend, nor even imaginative, but merely a conglomeration of the same oft-repeated phrases, illogically put together, and having neither aim nor sequence, neither beginning nor end. The usual theme of these stories is a conversation between a man and various animals, an entirely meaningless conversation in which it is impossible to discover a guiding idea. For instance:--

A man goes, goes, goes (this signifies a long journey , and is repeated several scores of times) and meets a wolf.

'Wolf, where art thou going?'

'In search of food for I am hungry, and my she-wolf is hungry, and my young ones are hungry.'

On hearing this reply, the man again goes, [108] goes, goes (here follows an almost endless repetition of the verb to go) and meets an eagle flying.

'Eagle, where art thou flying?'

'To seek food for I am hungry, and my mate is hungry, and my young ones are hungry.'

And in this way the man meets all the known animals inhabiting these regions, to each

of them he puts the same question, and from each receives the same answer. There is a great variety of animals in the forests, and the narrator feels bound not to omit a single one, from the reindeer down to the scarcely perceptible midge. For this reason the talk lasts for several hours, and yet the audience never appear tired of hearing the incessant repetition of the same phrases, and seem to hang on the words proceeding from the lips of the narrator.

A stranger listening to one of these stories is constantly expecting that the end of a Yakut's tale will show some meaning or carry some slight suspicion of a moral lesson, in fact, have some meaning; he rejoices in the hope that the man who is always going, and receives from all the animals he meets the same answer, will at last bethink himself that he too ought to imitate the four-footed or winged informants and seek [109] to support his wife. But no! the end of the story is as meaningless as the beginning, or, to speak more accurately, it has no end. The man who has been going so long at last stops, and -- there is no end.

One of the Irkoutsk merchants who related this to me, finding himself once in a yourt while some such narrative was going on, and seeing that the story-teller abruptly cut the thread of his discourse, asked,

'Well, the man went, and went, and stopped, and what then?'

'Then,' shyly answered the confused bard, 'then nothing, he stands, and that is all.'

36: Niemojowski--107-109 T-2 (no date) 1883 Yakut-3
116, 538

The Yakuts have about a score of similar themes to fill up the winter nights, but they are all of the same pattern, and the only difference is in another set of phrases being used. "

39: Jochelson E-5 (1888-97) 1906 Yakut

I have already mentioned that in former times horse-flesh and kumiss formed the staple food of the Yakut. The hay-makers often carried kumiss with them in skin bottles to the fields as their only food, and it was sufficient for them. "Kumiss slakes the thirst, exhilarates, restores strength, and does not overcharge the stomach," say the Yakut. The hay-makers worked easily and quickly. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that the horse became the object of a particular cult, as an animal on which man chiefly depended for his existence.

Kumiss and fat mare's flesh are regarded in the myths as food worthy of the heroes of divine origin. The horse, tradition says, was let down from heaven and given to man by the chief of the benevolent deities, Lord Bright-Creator (Ürüñ Aγγ Toyon).[1] According to another tradition recorded by me on the Kolyma River, Lord Bright-Creator sent down to earth another deity, Bar-Allei-Lord (Bar Allei Toyon), to instruct men how to make kumiss. The deity brought with him to the earth the ferment for making kumiss (*xoyū*). One of the ancestors of the Yakut tribe, Dyghyn, says another legend recorded by me, had such large droves of mares, that the kumiss made of their milk filled whole lakes, and everybody came to their borders and drank.

In the myths we find the winged steed an important personage, — the counsellor, assistant, and companion of the hero in battles and travels. Ayγγyt, the goddess of fecundity, is supposed to be near the mare during the first three days of foaling. The same deity, or another deity of the same name, — this is not quite clear, — also assists the lying-in woman. In love-songs we often find, by way of praise, the comparison of the hero to a colt, and of the heroine to a mare.

It is regarded as a sin to beat a horse. The bones of a horse must not lie on the ground. In olden times the bones of horses were placed on a platform. If a Yakut finds in his path

[1] For the division of Yakut supernatural beings into "creators" (*aγγy*) and "evil spirits" (*abaγy*), see JOCHELSON, The Koryak (Publications of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, Leiden, 1905, Vol. VI, p. 119).

53:Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

was a ceremonial libation of kumys in honor of the deities, prayers to them, the ceremonial drinking of the kumys from very large wooden goblets (choroon). After this there was feasting, games of various kinds, wrestling and so on. The attendants of the benevolent deities, the so-called ayyy-oyuuna ("white shamans"), were the masters of ceremonies at the festivities, although they died out among the Yakuts a long time ago, on account of the decline of this cult. By the end of the 19th century, there remained only legends of the white shamans. 796 [756] [178]

In the cult of both the benevolent and malevolent deities, a part was played at one stage by the military aristocracy—the toyons; they were usually the organizers. In their legendary genealogies the toyons often derived their names from the great and powerful deities. 565 796

The ancient ysyakh retained elements of the clan cult, and according to legend they had been organized according to clan in former times. The Yakuts retained other survivals of the clan cult, but these were not very clearly marked. For example, they retained elements of totemism, pointed out in the literature of the 18th century (Stralenberg). Each clan had at one time its own patron in the form of an animal; the clan totems were, for example, ravens, swans, falcons, eagles, squirrels, and so on. The members of a particular clan not only refrained from slaughtering their patrons and eating them as food, but also avoided mentioning them by name. 614 776

Associated with the clan cult was the worship of fire, which is still retained by the Yakuts. Fire, according to Yakut superstition, is the purest element and it was forbidden to defile or dishonor it. Before each meal was started, pieces of food were thrown into the fire; it was splashed with milk, kumys and so on. All this was considered a sacrifice to the master of the fire (Uot-ichchite). There was often not only a single master, but as many as seven brothers. No images were made of them. The cult of ancestors among the Yakuts was poorly developed. Among the deceased it was only the shamans and certain outstanding people whose memory was honored, and whose spirits, for some reason, were feared. 372 769

Folklore

The folklore of the Yakuts was somewhat one-sided, but in certain regions it reached a high artistic level. Apart from the wealth of varied and deeply poetic oral folklore, singing was far less developed and instrumental music hardly existed at all; dancing was fairly poorly developed and monotonous. In the realm of graphic art, the Yakuts only developed the applied forms—finishing and ornamentation of articles in everyday use. 53

A whole series of different genres and forms stand out among the oral creation of the Yakuts. One of the most interesting is the epic poem—the olonkho. 538

This is a very ancient type of folk poetry and originated in the clan-tribal age. The language of the olonkho is archaic, and contains a large number of obsolete, almost incomprehensible words and expressions, though it is at the same time rich, colorful and imaginative; the vocabulary of the epic contains almost twice as many words as the everyday language. Consequently, these works are difficult to translate into other languages. The olonkho describes the exploits of mythical warriors (bootur) and their struggles against the evil spirits, the abaasy. There are whole cycles of these poems built round the images

53:Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

538 of certain favorite heroes (Khan-Dzhargystay, Nyurgun Bootur, Bert-Khara, "The White Boy"); some of these cycles are so long that it takes several days on end to tell them. There were special storytellers called *олонхолут'ы* to recite these poems. A good storyteller was much respected among the people. He had to possess a wonderful memory, since he had to know by heart hundreds of thousands of verses; he had to have a poetic flair and at the same time a good voice and a musical ear, since the poems were partly intoned. The performance of the poems was a subject of special study. It was the custom to be as hospitable as possible to the storyteller, and many people would gather to listen to him. Sometimes the poems would be declaimed by several storytellers together, who to some extent or other dramatized the story, dividing the main roles among themselves; one sang the role of the hero, another the role of his adversary, while the third undertook the narrative part of the poem. The knowledge and narration of these poems was fast declining by the beginning of the 20th century, and there were fewer and fewer good storytellers of this kind; the collective singing of poems died out almost completely.

[178]

Alongside the epic poem, there were various historical Yakut legends called *былыргы сэһэннэр* ("Tales of Old Times"), or *өбүгэ сэһэннэрэ* ("Tales of Ancestors"). The themes in them dealt with genuine historical events and their heroes were historical personages; it stands to reason that both types were greatly modified and embellished with legendary motifs; the legends abound in anachronisms and it is impossible to relate them to any definite period without comparison with documentary sources. The latter show that there is usually a grain of truth in the legends. The best known are the stories of the "Yakut tsar" Tygyn (who was in actual fact a Kangalas toyon, living in the 17th century) and his rival Lëgëy (a Borogon toyon of the same period). There is most likely some historical truth as well in the widespread legends of the Yakut progenitors, Omokhoye and Elleye, who sailed by way of the Lena from the south; the legends, incidentally, are mainly to be found among the Yakuts from the Lena-Amga ulusy and are less known on the Vilyuy and in the northern regions.

The Yakut fairytales in verse are also colorful and interesting, particularly those about animals (they are called ostoruya from the Russian word "istoriya" (history), or kepsen. As distinct from the epics, these fairytales are not sung, but narrated; their language is quite different, and is simpler and more down to earth.

539 We should also point out the numerous and highly varied proverbs, sayings *тос хобооно*) and riddles (taabryn), which are at times extremely clever and neat. Here are some examples: "There is a silver dish floating in the middle of the sea" (the sun); "in the evening my mother gave birth, in the morning I gave birth to my mother" (freezing and melting of ice); "four children make the bed" (a horse's hooves); "it is said that snow falling on a tree stump does not melt" (gray hair); "two people are fighting with sticks on two sides of a little lake" (eyelids); "Mother roars and the little child runs away" (a gun and a bullet); "it is said that a giant thief stalks underground" (fishing net). Here are some examples of sayings and proverbs: "A hand does not move away from a sore place nor does one take one's eyes from one's beloved"; "a silent person is always regarded as a clever person"; "need whips the vine more painfully"; "the tree will not shake without the wind" (there's no smoke without fire); "a rich man is never satisfied with his own riches"; "this demon is only human in that he eats food" (said of rich people); and many others.

53;Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

The Press

The printing of books in Yakutiya followed the decision of the Yakut government to introduce the Yakut language into schools in 1922. The next year a Yakut-language paper, Kyym (The Spark), began to come out and was later made into the oblast daily paper. 204 [214]

At the present time 25 regional newspapers are published in the Republic, of which 17 are in the vernacular.

The State Yakut Publishing House was set up in 1926. In its 25 years of activity it has published 2735 different books. The total number of copies amounts to more than 14,000,000. 214

Scientific Research

A tremendous amount of research work has been carried out in Yakutiya during the Soviet period. The USSR Academy of Sciences and a number of ministries concerned with industry have taken part in studying the natural resources of the country. 815

At the present time there are in Yakutiya 12 research establishments and a Pedagogical Institute which also conducts research. A tremendous amount of work has been done in the field of the hydrometeorological study of the Yakut ASSR, study of the permafrost and the fish and fur resources, agrotechnology under Yakutiyan conditions and so on. Extensive work has been carried out in the field of the arts as well. The Research Institute for Language, Literature and History of the Yakut ASSR was opened in 1935 and has continued the work of the local studies association. During the last war the Institute switched from collecting research material to conducting major studies in Yakut history, folklore and language. The Yakut branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences, part of which is the Language, Literature and History Institute, has a well-stocked collection of folklore, numbering about 10,000 texts. A great deal of work in collecting material on folk music has been done under the guidance of the first Yakut composer, the late M. N. Zhirkov. For a number of years Professor A. P. Okladnikov has been engaged in a systematic study of Yakut archaeology. The results of this study are summed up in the first volume of "The History of Yakutiya". 814

Folk Singers and Storytellers in Soviet Yakutiya

Following the Socialist Revolution, profound changes occurred in the oral folklore of the Yakut people. Many genres of the traditional folklore, such as shaman spells and chants, fell into disuse, while others continued on in a completely different form (singing at the ysyakh-kumys festival.) The heroic tales—olonkho—have remained the favorite form of oral folklore; they are frequently sung on the radio and at club concerts, and are included in other performances. The talented narrators of these epics, or olonkho-suts, are very popular among Soviet audiences. Many of them are members of the Union of Soviet Writers. There are now more than 400 such storytellers on the registers. 538

493 case this is necessary during the journey. The stems of these legs are left thicker for greater strength at those points where they pass the opening for the end of the towrope. The upper ends of these legs are stuck into special openings in the projecting cornice of the bayka. The bayka is made from the boards of a larch tree which has a bend at the root in the shape of a tube, as a result of which there is a high bend in the back part to which is fastened the narrow board called tyntyr--which forms the "heel" or "tundra"--by means of an insertion with a strap or by using wooden nails. The same kind of board is fastened on in the front, as a result of which the sled is accordingly called "covered." The runners are thin at their front part, which is bent; the back part, which is straight, gradually grows thicker, forming a beam with four smoothed angles, and the back ends of the runners are pointed. The thin front parts of the runners have thick places [195] [Figures 11, 12, and 13] with openings vertically--through which is passed the rope which fastens the outboard pulleys on--and horizontally--for the crosspiece, called tuoraj, which connects both runners in the front; and since there are two or three crosspieces on the fancy sleds, there are [196] accordingly as many openings in the runners. A board flooring, tied onto the frame with straps or nailed to the towropes of the supporting legs with wooden nails, forms the seat (olok).

The open sled, or iraka, a light male sled, is distinguished from the preceding type of sled by its shorter legs, two to six in number, and it does not have the "tundra," for which reason it is called open--ahagas s'rga; the bayka is made of two straight laths, and the legs are slanted only to a slight degree. In the other details of its construction this type of sled is no different from the "covered" sled.

A particular type of iraka with two legs is called sobgooldo by the Tungus. The legs do not slant but are exactly vertical. The sobgooldo are for riding, but especially for transporting boats, and [735] have no board flooring [Fig. 15]. The riding sobgooldo are not used [538] very often; usually poor people ride on them, and a sarcastic attitude toward them is found among the Dolgan. In the epos it is predominantly representatives of the evil spirits or heroes who are being ridiculed, who ride on a sobgooldo.

Both of the above-mentioned types of sleds keep their length constant when the number of legs on them is increased. Therefore, when the number of legs is increased, the distance between adjacent legs is decreased. The slant of the legs is a result of the fact that

55:Popov E-5 (no date) 1964 RV2 Yakut RV2
Dolgan

421 was considered collective property, particularly in summer when several households nomadized together. Having killed a wild reindeer, the hunter 224 was expected to give up the skin and meat to the families of his group, but 226 keep the head and neck for himself. During the collective trapping of geese or spearing of wild reindeer a representative was chosen to make the division, and everything caught was divided up by families, according to the number of members.

224 The sites to be used by the nomadic groups for their summer hunting and fishing were decided in the spring, before the mosquitoes appeared. The heads of the groups would agree on the places where their own kin would hunt. Under this system each group hunted in new areas each year. Ownership of the polar-fox traps took a different form. The traps were private property. When setting new traps "behind" (i.e., to the south of) the old ones, no permission was required, but if they were set "in front of" the old ones (to the north), whence the polar fox came, it was essential to have the permission of the owner of the old traps, since when the foxes came down, they would be caught chiefly in the new ones. It was not forbidden to hunt other animals at the sites of the traps.

601 The system of kinship among the Dolgans was the classificatory type, 882 and the terms used for kinship were Yakut. The family was of the patriarchal type, but the young people enjoyed great freedom until they married.

771 Although the Dolgans were considered Christians and observed the ex- 776 ternal, ritualistic aspects of Russian Orthodoxy, they also retained their old animistic beliefs. Deities and spirits were divided into three categories (the same as for the Yakuts): ichchi, or incorporeal, invisible beings, who brought to life anything which they entered; ayyy or spirits well-disposed towards humans; abaasy or spirits hostile towards humans and causing various sicknesses and misfortunes; these lived in the earth and in the underworld. A person was believed to get sick and die because the abaasy had stolen his soul and carried it away to the underworld, and then, in- 756 vading the person, proceeded to eat him. The guardians of the people against the wicked spirits and mediators between humans and spirits were [171] the oyun or shamans. The shaman garb and tambourine among the Dolgans were the same as among the Evenks.

In their religion the Dolgans worshipped the so-called saytaans. The 776 saytaans could take a great variety of forms, for example, a stone of unusual shape or an ugly wild-deer antler. Any object could be a saytaan if a shaman commanded a spirit, ichchi, to enter it. The saytaans were greatly revered both as family and hunting patrons.

764 The Dolgans buried their dead in the ground. The western (Noril'sk) [531] Dolgans did not usually erect a log structure over the grave, but only left a mound of earth onto which they felled a tree. The eastern Dolgans built log structures over the grave, which they often embellished with intricate carving. A reindeer was slaughtered near the grave and the clothing in which the deceased had died was either left on the ground or hung on the tree.

Folklore

538 The indigenous folklore of the Dolgans was represented by riddles, tales, historical legends, epic poems and stories of everyday life—the latter constituting the predominant type. The stories tell of the nomadic life of the Dolgans in all its real, everyday context. They are brief, but extremely varied in content. Very popular were stories of animals—their origin, their metamorphosis into people and back again. A particular group was composed

55:Popov E-5 (no date) 1964 RV2 Yakut RV2
Dolgan

Women's chestpiece embroidered with colored beads.

of tales called ustuoruya (from the Russian word "istoriya" or history), in which the heroes were Russian merchants, poor state-owned peasants, Ivan Tsarevich and other characters from Russian fairytales. Their plots are also close to those of the Russian tales. The historical legends tell of journeys to strange countries and the unusual adventures involved. Some of them are close in content to the legends of the Olenek Khosun epic.

Both in theme and in method of narration, the epic tales were very close to the Yakut olonkho and were even called by the same name. They often describe a way of life alien to the Dolgans; they mention horses and cows, but hardly ever mention reindeer. Their theme is the struggle between heroes and persons consorting with evil spirits. The dialogues, just as in the Yakut epic tales, were sung. Dolgan songs are either short (lyrical) or long. The former were not performed by professionals, and the composers and performers were usually boys and girls. The long songs were performed by highly gifted improvisers or "songsters," who were relatively few and far between.

The storytellers were regarded as the elite, chosen by the good deities and spirits. Gifted storytellers created their own schools and whole generations of young storytellers studied under them. According to the old beliefs of the Dolgans, all the images drawn by the storytellers could be turned into visible images or shadows. This belief in the ability of the storyteller to re-create real images by his words was exploited by the Dolgan shamans to make their methods of "curing" the sick more convincing. Sometimes, to determine which spirit the disease had come from, the shaman would send for a storyteller. The latter would begin telling an epic tale as dusk fell. As soon as the hero of the tale began to gain the upper hand over his adversary, the spirit which had allegedly been eating the patient began to emerge to help his brother spirit. As soon as he saw the evil spirit and knew what kind it was, the shaman cast a spell, now knowing what he had to do to cure the sick person. During heavy epidemics shamans often resorted to the help of the storytellers by asking them to spend evenings telling stories in which all the adventures of the heroes had a happy ending. Since it was considered that the images in the epic tales became visible, in the spring, when the geese arrived, no stories were recounted so that the images would not frighten the geese. To avoid frightening wild deer, stories were not told on the eve of the hunt.

The Dolgans had no musical instruments. It was only at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries that the Yakut jew's-harp began to